"EMOTION-RELATED WORDS" IN PERSIAN DICTIONARIES: CULTURE, MEANING AND EMOTION THEORY

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Abstract

Aimes: Vocabulary, written or oral, may potentially mirror the attitudes, emotionality, thinking styles, mentality and cultural tendencies among people. This research aimed to scrutinise the emotion-related words (ERWs) vs. the cognition-related words (CRWs) of three Persian dictionaries (namely, *Moeen, Amid* and *Moaser*), exploring cultural differences in terms of positive/negative and somatic/non-somatic aspects. *Method:* All entries in these three dictionaries were scrutinised by three independent judges all of whom were psychologists. The final judgments incorporated feedback which included descriptive and qualitative comments provided by a cognitive linguist. Non-parametric data (frequencies and ratios) on somatic/non-somatic, positive/negative and common/uncommon components of the target words were analysed by SPSS for Windows v19. *Results:* The results show that the ratio of negative ERWs is higher than positive ERWs, compared to both positive and negative CRWs. Moreover, 30-45% of ERWs were somatic (contained body-related component/s). *Conclusion:* The findings appear to be in line with theories suggesting that people with Eastern cultural backgrounds are more likely to express their feelings through body-related words; a fact that may be correlated with the high level of somatisation symptoms in Eastern countries.

Keywords: Emotion words, Dictionaries, Persian, Somatization, Culture

Introduction

> '*...the bodily changes follow directly the PERCEPTION of the fact, and ... our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion.*'
> (William James, 1884, P. 189; Italics and capitals in original)\

Emotion and language

Emotions are complex constructs which are culturally influenced and interpersonally processed, manifested and interpreted (Fussell, 2002). In order to explore the complexity of the verbal communication of emotions then, we need to turn to an interdisciplinary approach which gives access to insights from psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, anthropological linguistics, ethnomethodology, cognitive psychology, social psychology, and clinical psychology (Niemeier, 1997). Each of these different disciplines may contribute to more accurate, richer insight into emotion.

Some studies (e.g., Pennebaker, 2011) have shown that words used in written and spoken language may correspond to our emotionality, personality, thinking style, attitude,

communication, etc. For instance, different patterns of words and writing styles (e.g. formal, analytical, narrative) used by students in their written essays, were found to be associated with their personality traits. High scorers on formal writing (or thinking) tended to be more preoccupied with status and power, less self-reflective, less honest, more mentally healthy, less open to new experiences, and drank/smoked less compared to those who scored higher on analytical writing, who were found to be more honest and open to new experiences. High scorers also tended to have better social skills and more friends.

An array of verbal material exits in all languages to be utilised when expressing and conveying feelings and emotions. From the psycholinguistic viewpoint, people usually use two types of expression, namely, literal (e.g., angry, sad, disgusting, etc) and figurative (e.g., heart-broken, shattered, breath-taking) to convey how they feel (Clore, Ontony, & Foss, 1987; Kaviani & Hamedi, 2011; McMullen & Conway, 2002; Ontony, Clore, & Collins, 1988). However, Wierzbicka (1999) suggests all linguistic facets of words such as grammar and intonation need to be examined cross-culturally in order to ascertain the actual use made of them, by the speaker.

Emotion in its cultural context

The interrelations between emotions and culture may be reflected in everyday language and vocabulary use and therefore investigated. Goddard (2002) shows that culture has a role to play in the way people display their emotions as well as how they interpret and react to the emotional displays of others. He emphasises that research in this field should take semantic differences between languages into consideration when examining emotion across cultures. In the absence of careful cultural, linguistic scrutiny, the verbatim (word by word) translation from one language to another can be confusing – essence is lost in translation.

Language analysis may reveal important cultural assumptions. Farooq et al (1995) and others have found that people with Eastern cultural backgrounds tend to express depression and anxiety through bodily complaints and ailments rather than through the use of psychological terms. In these cultures, a person's response to a difficult life situation might be expressed in terms that are primarily physical (somatic). Somatising feelings and emotions in language (e.g. heart-broken, gutted, etc) may be related to variations in acceptable expression, or a suppression of emotionality among people in a given culture. It would seem that the more a culture encourages people to express and share their actual emotions, the less they present with somatic symptoms that may be traced to emotional causes. On the other hand, the less a culture allows people to express their emotions and feelings freely and explicitly, the more they suppress such emotions and the more they present with somatic (somatization) symptoms (e.g. King and Emmons, 1991; Kleinman and Kleinman, 1985; see also Pennebaker, 1995; Pennebaker and Seagal, 1999).

Based on these findings, one can surmise that emotions are conceptualized differently across different cultures and that people with different cultural backgrounds both see and interpret their emotional experiences in different ways. However, there are also similarities across cultures with regard to emotional experiences that should be taken into consideration while examining emotion-related words. This gives the present study a reasonable basis for the study of emotions-related words in Persian dictionaries. We hypothesised that target entries of emotion-related words in Persian dictionaries are more negative and somatic compared to entries in the same dictionaries associated with cognition and intellectual functioning.

Relevance of the present study

Emotions, communicated either verbally or in written form, are eventually reflected in formal vocabularies and dictionaries. Although the literature on the associations between emotions and language has achieved considerable diversification (see *inter alia*, Fussell, 2002), few studies have taken emotion-related words in written references (such as dictionaries) as the area of investigation. Large volume dictionaries offer a valuable corpus for this project. Analysing the entries of dictionaries in the present study can be understood as a systematic attempt to identify the availability and breadth of emotion-related words in a particular language.

This research aimed to investigate the frequencies of somatic/non-somatic, positive/negative, and common/uncommon components of emotion- vs. cognition-related words in Persian dictionaries. Three Persian dictionaries, i.e. Moeen (Moeen, 2001, reprint), Amid (Amid, 2001, reprint), and Moaser (Sadri-Afshar, et al., 2001) were examined. McBurney (1998) states that the archival method is at the risk of biases which may occur when collecting data. For this reason and in order to limit these types of biases, this study benefited from the input of three independent 'judges' (see below). The results may be useful in helping us to further understand the role of culture in encouraging people to either express or supress their feelings and emotions. Understanding the sources of variation in emotional expression is important for clinicians and other professionals working with culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

Method

Subjects (words): All entries in three of the best-known Persian dictionaries were qualitatively and quantitatively investigated with regard to their type (emotion/cognition), hedonic tone (positive/negative), somaticism (somatic/non-somatic) and commonness (common/uncommon).

Independent Judges: Three psychologists, a clinical psychologist (PhD, university Associate Professor), a general psychologist (PhD, Assistant Professor) and an educational psychologist (MSc, researcher) reviewed all entries independently. The judges each had at least 10 years experience in research, teaching and practice in their background. Each first scrutinized the emotion and cognition-related words based on the equivalent meanings (in front of each entry in the dictionary). They then categorized the target words in terms of positive/negative, somatic/non-somatic, and common/uncommon, again based on the equivalent meanings. Discrepancies between reviewers were addressed through discussion. Eventually, two agreed opinions out of three were used to determine any remaining differences. There was less than 2% disagreement and thiswas resolved in this way.

Categorical variables:

(a) Emotion/cognition: This prime categorization was to assess and determine words which were associated with either emotion or cognition. Emotion-related words (ERWs) included all entries which were related in any way with human feelings and sentiments. Cognition-related words (CRWs) included those entries which were related to cognitive domains such as thinking, attention, memory, problem-solving, decision-making, judgment, consciousness, etc. The entries extracted at this stage were exposed to the subsequent categorizations. No words were stratified as a mixed category, since only less than 1% of extracted words fell under both cognition and emotion categories. Therefore, they were added to both ERWs and CRWs lists.

(b) Positive/negative: Based on the hedonic tone of the words, these were categorized as positive, negative or both (dual). The latter included those which could convey both positive and negative hedonic tones.

(c) Somatic/non-somatic: A word was categorized as somatic if it contained one (or more) body-related component(s).
(d) Common/uncommon: Linguistic expressions of ERWs which are commonly used by native speakers to talk and write about their feelings, thoughts, etc. This was a qualitative judgement made by judges. Incidences/examples of certain target words were categorized as common if the judges identified them as being in current usage in everyday written and verbal communications. This dichotomous categorization was used to filter out uncommon words in order to further examine whether or not the findings change.

Examples

Two examples of ERWs and CRWs are as follows. These indicate the Farsi words, *their* equivalent meanings, the meanings inEnglish and their given categorization,
غژم GHOZDM: γožm خشم (anger), [emotion, negative, non-somatic, uncommon]
کافتن KAFTAN: kāf-tan جستجو کردن؛ کاویدن (search, exploration), [cognition, dual, non-somatic, uncommon]

Procedure

The three judges examined all entries of the above mentioned Persian dictionaries and categorized the ERWs and CRWs accordingly. They also categorized the target words in terms of their hedonic tone using the three categories given above, namely positive, negative and dual, somaticism (two categories: somatic and non-somatic) and commonness (two categories: common and uncommon). The latter enabled investigators to filter out uncommon words from commonly used words.

Final assessments were then reviewed by a cognitive linguist with 8 years of experience in psycholinguistic field, who is a PhD in the field of linguistics and Associate Professor. His feedback was then discussed in the weekly judges' conferences and incorporated where appropriate. The linguist's feedback on approximately 4% of categorizations most of which, lay in the categories of somaticism and commonness resulted in new decisions made by the three judges.

The Persian dictionaries

Lexicography started in ancient Persia (Iran) more than 2000 years ago with dictionaries called "Ueem" and "Menakhay". Throughout the 20th century, different systematic attempts have been made to compile Persian dictionaries by using a methodology-based lexicography. This is characterized by a series of defined steps such as conducting a systematic survey to identify corpora, using rigorous inclusion criteria to collect words, using phonetic symbols, cross-checking entries, annotating wordlists by native speakers and the like (see Svensén, 1993). The dictionaries, Moeen, Amid, and Moaser, which were investigated in this project have been compiled over the past 80 years respectively; the first is the oldest and the last is the most recent. This may potentially allow us to look further into any cultural changes over this period of time in Iranian society. All three dictionaries include all of the tenses of a given verb as a single entry.

1. Moeen Dictionary (Moeen, 2001, reprint), the two-volume version (adapted from a six-volume version), was used in this study. This dictionary, compiled in the 1950s is based on classic and contemporary written texts in the literary and scientific domains. The two-volume version contains approximately 43000 entries.

2. Amid Dictionary (Amid, 2001, reprint), the one-volume version was used in this study. This dictionary was compiled during the 1950s and 1960s and contains words

extracted from classic and contemporary written texts in literature and science. This dictionary contains about 39000 entries.

3. Moaser (Sadri-Afshar, et al., 2001).Compiled during the 1980s and 1990s, the one-volume version was used in this study and contains about 50000 entries. In this dictionary, the words have been collected from both written and oral examples in general contemporary culture (including pop culture),.

Data analysis

The following formula was used to calculate word ratio (WR): $\frac{Identified\ words}{Total\ entries} \times (100)$. A series of chi-squares were conducted to examine the differences between WRs of various categories. It should be noted that in order to re-analyse the data on only commonly used words, we excluded words classed as non-common from all further analysis. SPSS v.19 was used to analyse the data.

Results

General findings

A total of 653 ERWs and 1110 CRWs were identified in the three dictionaries. Table 1 presents further details of frequencies and word ratios (WR) of two types of words separately in Moeen, Amid, and Moaser dictionaries. Use of Chi-square showed WRs of ERWs and CRWs differ significantly across data sets selected from each of the dictionaries ($x^2 = 65.3, p < .001$). This suggests that the number of ERWs and CRWs has decreased over time. In total, the dictionaries contain more CRWs (WR = .84) than ERWs (WRs = .51).

Table 1: Frequencies and WRs of ERWs and CRWs the data sets selected from each of the dictionaries.

Dictionaries	ERWs Frequency (WR)	CRWs Frequency (WR)	Total entries
Moeen	317 (.74)	401 (.93)	43,000
Amid	175 (.45)	358 (.92)	39,000
Moaser	161 (.32)	351 (.71)	50,000
Total	653 (.51)	1110 (.84)	132,000

WRs: Word Ratios, ERWs: Emotion-related Words: CRWs: Cognition-related words

When non-common words were filtered out and the data re-analysed, the incidence of WRs of ERWs appeared to be higher than those in Amid and Moaser dictionaries ($x^2 = 53.62, p < .001$). The WRs of CRWs did not differ across dictionaries ($p > .05$). For more detail, see Table 2. Again, in total, the dictionaries contain more CRWs (WR = .56) than ERWs (WRs = .36).

Table 2: Frequencies and WRs of Commonly used ERWs and commonly used CRWs across the data sets selected from each of the dictionaries.

Dictionaries	ERWs Frequency (WR)	CRWs Frequency (WR)	Dictionary entries Total entries
Moeen	199 (.46)	272 (.63)	43,000
Amid	108 (.28)	260 (.66)	39,000
Moaser	151 (.32)	325 (.65)	50,000
Total	458 (.36)	857 (.65)	132,000

WRs: Word Ratios, ERWs: Emotion-related Words: CRWs: Cognition-related words

As seen in Table 3, approximately 65% of both ERWs and CRWs in Moeen and Amid and 95% in Moaser are commonly used words.

Table 3: Percentages of commonly used ERWs and CRWs across the data sets selected from each of the dictionaries.

Dictionaries	Common ERWs	Common CRWs	Total
Moeen	64%	68%	66%
Amid	62%	72%	67%
Moaser	96%	94%	95%

ERWs: Emotion-related Words: CRWs: Cognition-related words

Positive and negative words

Figure 1 displays percentages of ERWs and CRWs with positive, negative and dual emotional tone separately for the data sets selected from each of the dictionaries. It seems that the percentage of negative ERWs is higher than that of positive ones in all three dictionaries ($x^2 = 57.24, p < .001$). Most of the CRWs were categorized as dual.

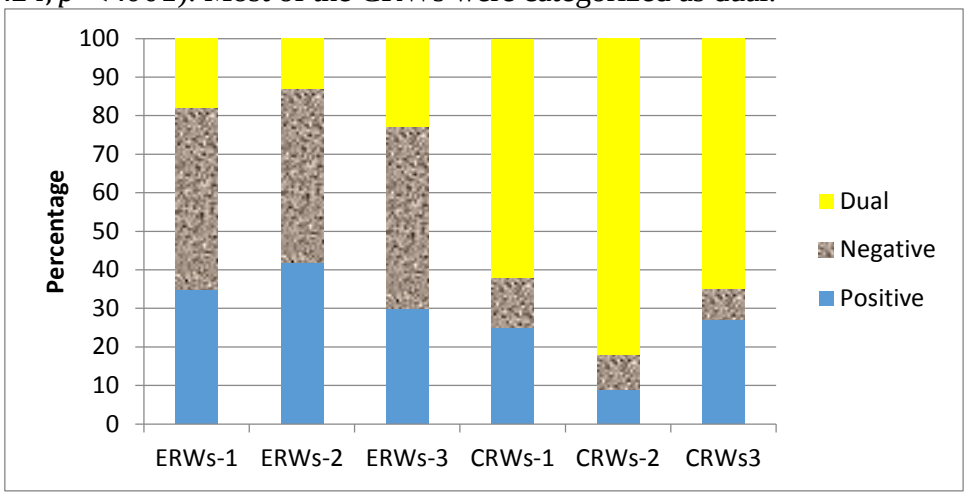

Figure 1: Percentage of ERWs and CRWs with positive, negative and dual emotional tones across the data sets selected from each of the dictionaries (1 = Moeen, 2 = Amid, 3 = Moaser)

When included only commonly used words in the re-analysis, similar results were obtained ($x^2 = 62.72, p < .001$) (see Figure 2).

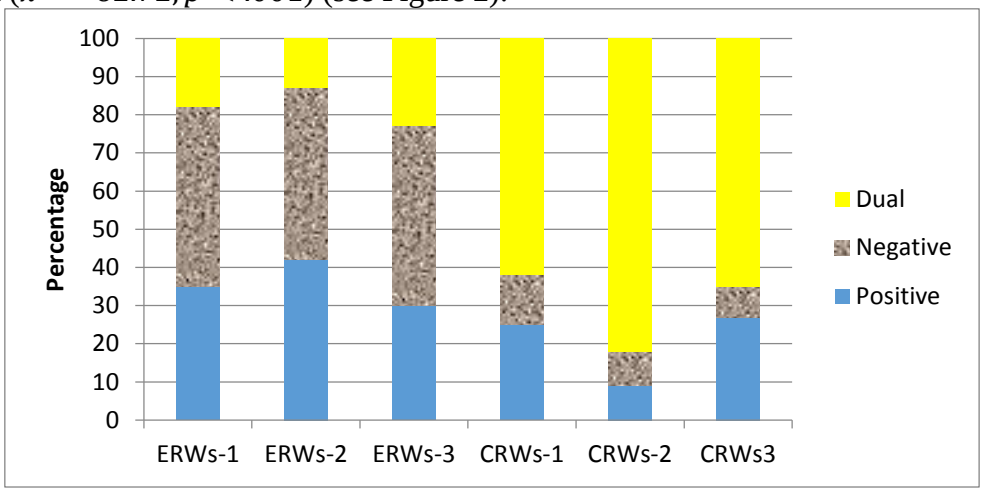

Figure 2: Percentage of *commonly used* ERWs and CRWs with positive, negative and dual emotional tones across the data sets selected from each of the dictionaries (1 = Moeen, 2 = Amid, 3 = Moaser)

Somatic and non-somatic words

As demonstrated in Figure 3, approximately 30% of ERWs selected from all three dictionaries are somatic words compared to CRWs (3%) ($x^2 = 54.21, p < .001$). When re-

analysed, the data on commonly used words revealed similar findings ($x^2 = 48.54, p < .001$). See Figure 4 for further details.

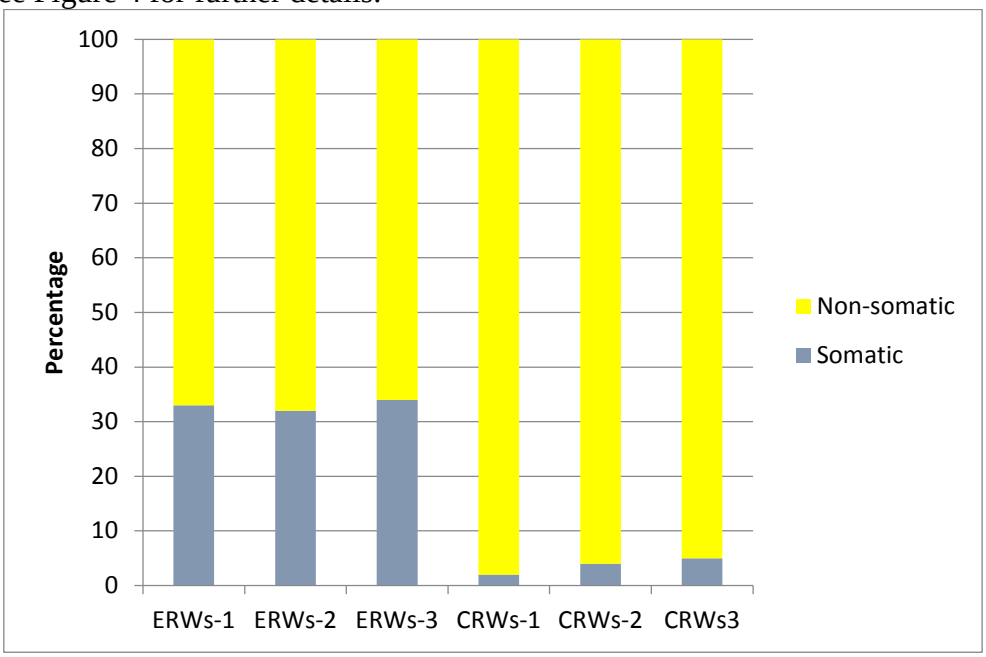

Figure 3: Percentage of ERWs and CRWs with or without somatic part across the data sets selected from each of the dictionaries (1 = Moeen, 2 = Amid, 3 = Moaser)

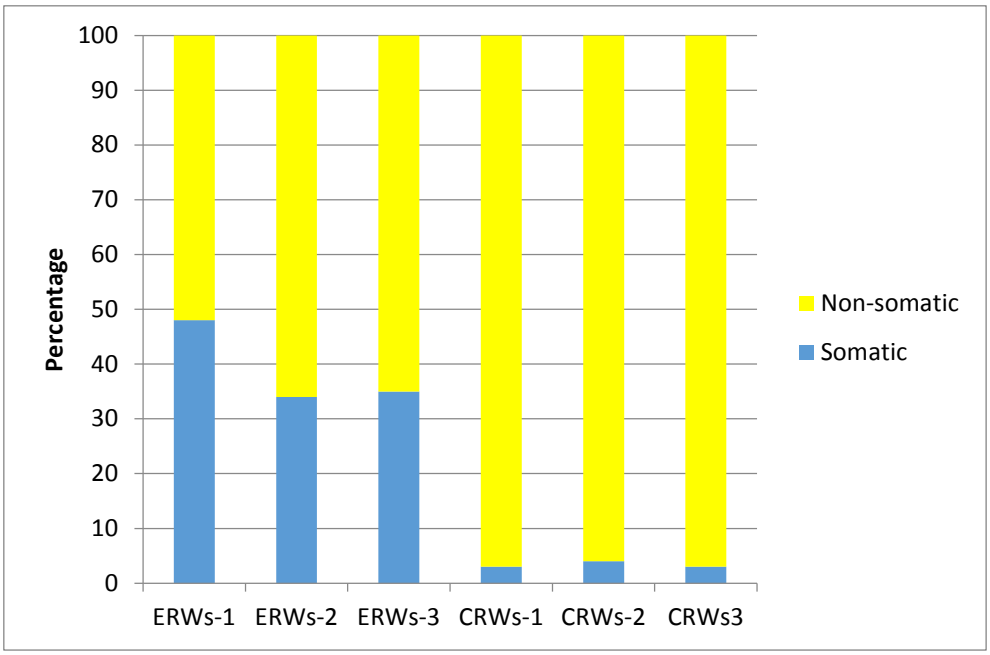

Figure 4: Percentage of *commonly used* ERWs and CRWs with or without somatic part across the data sets selected from each of the dictionaries (1 = Moeen, 2 = Amid, 3 = Moaser)

Conclusion

This paper reports on our study of emotion-related vocabulary, as identified in the corpus of 3 Persian dictionaries. Our assumption was that emotion-related words are not simply isolated elements employed to differentiate and specify emotional states We argue that research can help to determine whether ERWs reflect a literal, concrete description, or potentially bear implicit, important meanings. Investigation of 'emotions' vocabulary is a potentially productive step for reifying the concepts encapsulated in emotion-related words. Some authors (Wierzbicka,1999) believe 'only by studying words, one can go beyond words'

and identify the cultural meanings attached to each word in a given language. With regards to this statement, however, one might argue that people from differing cultural backgrounds may speak the same language but nevertheless attach different meanings to the same words. Although this field of study has received little attention, it may well have a bearing on cross – cultural conceptualizing of emotions and our understanding of cultural differences.

We scrutinized Persian vocabulary registered in three well known Persian dictionaries to examine emotion and cognition related words (abbreviated as ERWs and CRWs) in terms of their hedonic tone (positive, negative and dual) and somaticism (somatic and non-somatic). The literature search reveals that no findings so far have been reported in this respect. The underlying assumption in the present study was that the vocabulary used by people may reflect the association between the cultural tendencies and verbal expressions represented in vocabulary registered in dictionaries. A dichotomous categorization was used to filter out uncommon words in order to further examine whether or not the data re-analysis on commonly used data leads to the same end.

The first finding deserving mention here is that the frequency of ERWs is less than CRWs in all three dictionaries. This may imply that Persian speakers have produced, and used more CRWs than ERWs in their written and oral communications over time, which may reflect sociocultural changes and trends. However we ought to bear in mind that words in dictionaries are likely to reflect universal categories and might not necessarily represent the frequency of the used words in actual everyday communication in a particular cultural context. The results also show that there is a decline of commonly used ERWs in the second and the third dictionaries compared to the first one whilst CRWs remain almost constant across dictionaries. This may be ascribed to the original sources the dictionaries used to compile the words; for example the first two dictionaries relied heavily on written documents, but the other drew on a broader range of sources, including scientific and literary texts as well as everyday cultural exchanges and texts. On the other hand, this decline may be suggestive of broader, sociocultural shifts in the ways in which people express their emotional lives over time, within a changing cultural and political environment.

A further objective of the present research was to assess the emotional tone of the target words. A division of emotions into positive and negative categories potentially organizes diverse sets of emotion-related words into a coherent system. Negative ERWs turned out to be more frequent than positive ones in all three dictionaries, compared to CRWs. This finding is in line with other well documented research findings reporting that people in Western countries tend to value positive emotions and discourage negative emotions whilst people in Eastern countries tend to display negative emotions such as sadness, fear and anger (Eid & Diener, 2001; see also Heine & Hamamura, 2007; Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Miyamoto, Uchida, & Ellsworth, 2010). Bearing this in mind the results of the present study might highlight the fact that in some cultural settings, there exist more negative words available to be used by people when describing their emotional interactions. This may be reflective of a broader cultural bias against emotional literacy, and an ambivalence regarding the use, or value of such expressions. Apart from this, approximately 15%-25% of targeted ERWs were categorised as dual or mixed (implying both positive and negative emotional tone). Research shows that in Western culture (specifically American), it is a norm that people avoid contradiction and try to polarize attitudes while their counterparts in Eastern countries (specifically Asians) attempt a linguistic compromise (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). This account might explain a tendency among people from Eastern cultures to experience more mixed and negative emotions. If this is the case, there are important ramifications for talking therapies with clients from the Persian backgrounds of this present study. Clients from such backgrounds in receipt of therapy in their own language may be expressing psychological distress through the filter of linguistic biases such as those

identified in this study. On the other hand, clients from Persian backgrounds receiving therapy in a second language such as English, are drawing on, and exposed to the linguistic devices of a different cultural milieu and *its* bias, as represented in its vocabulary. The ways in which experiences and emotional reactions are encoded becomes more complex when more than one language is spoken (Costa & Dewaele, 2010). In each of these clinical situations, therapists need to recognise the approximation of language, and the potential discrepancy between experience and its emotions and the body of available vocabulary available through which to accurately express these.

The present research also aimed to work out the ratio of somatic ERWs and CRWs. The results show 30 - 40 percent of ERWs contained component/s related to the body organs, compared to only 3 percent of CRWs. This might suggest that Iranian people are more likely to use body-related words to express emotional states, a finding that seems to comply with the assumption that the more a culture encourages people to suppress their actual emotions the more they tend to communicate their feelings through the use of body-related words. This is also in line with the results of some studies (e.g., Farooq, 1885; Kleinman and Kleinman, 1985) suggesting that people with Asian cultural backgrounds tend to somatise their psychological symptoms and express these through bodily complaints.

This suggestion has further ramifications for the broader medical context. It would seem pertinent that the medical profession in Iran be aware of a possible tendency on the part of Persian mother-tongue speakers to somatise as a consequence of there being limited acceptable linguistic means by which to narrate psychological 'dis-ease'. An individual immersed in an Eastern cultural context expressing loss may go to a doctor and complain about physical aches and pains, such as headaches, backaches, muscular pains. In contrast, one from a European background undergoing the same life event might present himself or herself as depressed. The words that the person uses to describe their 'troubles' or sufferings implicitly reflect the underpinning philosophical viewpoint of the culture to which the person belongs. It seems that people in Western cultures more readily use abstract terms and words such as depression, anxiety, guilt, to express their feelings and emotions. This reflects not only the development of a language over time and its acquisition of new words and terms, but also the cultural climate which allows or discourages such words from entering the mainstream.

To interpret further the findings of the present study, an interdisciplinary approach is recommended, one that draws on fields such as psychology, sociology, anthropology and linguistics as emphasised by scientists (e.g., O'Connell and Kowal, 2011). This multidisciplinary approach would provide a more complete picture and knowledge that may benefit media such as radio, television, published material and on-line forums when dealing with and addressing emotional expressions in different cultural and ethnic contexts. There are, of course, the described important clinical implications of these results for clinical psychologists, counsellors and therapists dealing with clients coming from a diverse set of backgrounds.

Our literature review suggests a lack of research investigating body-related emotion terms. One might argue that, for example, the differences between body-related ERWs and body-related CRWs imply a universal categorization which is reflected across various languages. Using the same methodology to collect data from dictionaries used in Western societies, such as the Standard English dictionary might provide information regarding cross-cultural differences in this respect and add more to the picture sketched in this preliminary paper. English and Persian are members of the same family of languages, namely Indo-European, with some morphological and structural differences and similarities (see Keshavarz, 2007, for more related details). Future research planned by the authors will explore this potentiality.

Beyond this, we suggest that a much wider range of figurative language needs to be examined in future studies. As pointed out in Gibbs (1994), there are many kinds of figurative language (e.g., metonymy, proverbs, oxymora, euphemism, slang), each of which might have their own respective pragmatic and emotional properties. Future research would benefit from exploring what use is made by such linguistic strategies such as metaphor and simile in the absence of a rich emotion related vocabulary, as well as paralinguistic features such as exclamation.

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